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E.O. 12958, as amended
June 9, 2005

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No. 0612/69

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
6 February 1969

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Pakistan: III

Summary

Antigovernment disturbances, which began last October, continued to plague Pakistan in January with the pace quickening in the latter part of the month. Curfews of varying severity were imposed in many of the urban centers in both wings of the country and the army was called into several of the major cities to restore peace. The Ayub regime appeared to be losing support within various segments of the population, although there were no new reports of disaffection within the critically important armed forces.

On 1 February President Ayub announced his willingness to meet with leaders of "responsible" opposition political parties to discuss possible constitutional changes. On 5 February the invitation was modified apparently to include virtually any of his major opponents. His proposal, however, involved far less than the more militant opposition spokesmen and student leaders have been demanding. New and perhaps more violent demonstrations are

Note: This memorandum was produced solely by CIA. It was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence and coordinated with the Office of National Estimates and the Clandestine Services. This memorandum brings up to date two earlier memoranda. The first was published on 2 December 1968 (No. 1583/68) and the second on 30 December 1968 (No. 2259/68).

No Foreign Dissem
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~~SECRET~~
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likely, and the government appears to be approaching a point where it may have to make major concessions to its opponents--unlikely as long as Ayub remains in power--or attempt to reimpose stability in the nation by the use of even more stringent repressive measures. Should Ayub choose the latter course, his future will be even more dependent on the unswerving loyalty of the armed forces.

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~~SECRET~~

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The Political Scene

1. The disparate political forces arrayed against Ayub were at least partially successful in submerging their differences and creating a unified command when, on 8 January, spokesmen for eight political parties of the center and right announced formation of the Democratic Action Committee (DAC). Two small but significant opposition parties remained outside the new coalition--the pro-Chinese Communist branch of the National Awami Party of East Pakistan (NAP/L) and the leftist Peoples' Party of Pakistan (PPP), a largely personal political movement formed in 1968 by the former foreign minister, Z. A. Bhutto, now in jail.

2. The DAC offered an eight-point "minimum program" for the "restoration of democracy" in Pakistan. The program called for a return to a federal parliamentary system of government as opposed to the presidential system currently in operation; the institution of direct universal suffrage as opposed to the present indirect election of legislatures and president via an electoral college of some 120,000 "Basic Democrats"; and the restoration of various civil rights. The DAC leaders also announced a joint decision to boycott the 1969-70 elections if they were held under the present electoral system. The DAC decision to boycott the elections received the enthusiastic support of the leader of the NAP/L, who promised his party's cooperation in the effort, but was criticized by a spokesman for the PPP. This same spokesman had earlier announced Bhutto's intention to contest the presidential election; although Bhutto has made no statement himself and another of his lieutenants has denied that the former foreign minister will be a candidate.

3. Meanwhile, three possible but undeclared candidates for the presidency, all of whom have refrained from joining any opposition political party, continued relatively active. Former army general and ex-governor of East Pakistan Azam Khan was well received on his first political swing through the frontier area of West Pakistan

No Foreign Dissem

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No Foreign Dissem

near Peshawar. Former Chief Justice Syed Murshed of East Pakistan was slated to tour West Pakistan during the latter part of January. The most effective opposition spokesman remains former air marshal Asghar Khan, who briefly attended the DAC organizational meeting in Dacca and who received a tumultuous welcome on his arrival in Karachi early in January. His increasingly sharp attacks against the government are beginning to convince the most cynical observers that he is not working behind the scenes with Ayub but has indeed broken his ties with the regime. Moreover, his reputation for incorruptability and his basic conservatism have continued to make him, unlike Bhutto, acceptable to many members of both the political and economic "establishment." Asghar presumably retains widespread popularity within the military services--particularly within the air force--but the amount of support that he could expect, in a contest for the presidency, especially among senior officers, is not yet known.

The Demonstrations

4. The DAC launched its campaign to force concessions from the government with announcement of a province-wide strike, "Demand Day," in East Pakistan on 17 January. East Pakistan Governor Monem Khan warned opposition leaders that he would use whatever force was necessary to ensure compliance with the terms of recently reimposed regulations forbidding demonstrations or the gathering of more than three people. The DAC leaders capitulated and 17 January passed relatively quietly in Dacca.

5. Over a period of the next several days, however, the students at Dacca University and other schools, apparently infuriated by Monem Khan's repressive tactics, took to the streets. Clashes with the police and the paramilitary East Pakistan Rifles followed and on 20 January one of the students was killed. As violence rapidly spread throughout the cities of East Pakistan, the students in the West began organizing sympathy demonstrations.

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6. Daily disorders throughout Pakistan culminated in a massive general strike on 24 January. On that date and in the days immediately following, pitched battles were fought with the police; pro-government newspaper offices, government buildings, and even the homes of officials were attacked and some were gutted by fire. Eventually the government was forced to impose curfews on most of the nation's cities, and the army was called in to restore order and enforce the curfew in Dacca, Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, and several smaller communities.

7. By the beginning of February, over 30 deaths were directly attributable to the violence, scores had been injured, and hundreds were under arrest. Although relative calm had been restored, sporadic violence was reported in both East and West Pakistan. What would happen when the army was withdrawn was unclear, but student leaders and some opposition spokesmen, apparently convinced that the government was reeling, indicated they intended to press home the attack at the earliest opportunity.

The Government's Reaction

8. The government in Rawalpindi continues to give the impression that it is either unaware of the widespread nature and determination of the opposition or is incapable of moving quickly and surely to defuse the situation. An example of the government's poor timing in grudgingly offering concessions to its opposition was the repeal of the restrictive West Pakistan University Ordinance of 1961 on 23 January. The ordinance had long been the target of attack by students and its repeal in October or November would have earned the government good will from a group that has become increasingly receptive to calls for violence. By 23 January, however, riots were erupting all over Pakistan and the conclusion was inescapable that the government was acting, not from a position of strength but from weakness as a result of pressure applied in the streets.

~~No Foreign Dissem~~
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DECLASSIFIED

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E.O. 12958, as amended

June 9, 2005

~~SECRET~~

~~No Foreign Dissem~~

9. Repeatedly throughout January there were reports that Ayub was willing to meet with opposition leaders in an effort to work out a solution to the developing crisis. During the height of the demonstrations in Dacca, presidential adviser Fida Hassan arrived from Rawalpindi to confer with Governor Monem Khan. Rumors circulated that he, and possibly another emissary from Ayub, was also in contact with Nuril Amin, leader of the opposition in the National Assembly.

10. On 1 February, in his traditional first-of-the-month speech to the nation, Ayub offered to consult "shortly" with representatives of "responsible political parties." Noting that the 1962 constitution could be amended, he said that he would agree to any settlement "arrived at through mutual discussions." A few days later, the President proposed that the meeting take place on 17 February in Rawalpindi. Ayub invited a leading spokesman for the DAC to call "whomever you like" among opposition politicians to the meeting. This blanket invitation apparently could even include Bhutto--one of Ayub's bitterest opponents.

11. Whether this proposal will be accepted by the DAC, any of its component members, or the parties of the far left remains to be seen. The opposition's initial reaction was guarded, although one DAC leader in Dacca laid down specific terms to be met prior to any conference, including the ending of the state of emergency imposed in 1965 and the release of political prisoners.

12. Spokesmen for the PPP and the NAP/L have confined their comments to reiteration that the demands of the people are not negotiable. Meanwhile, the largest and most active of the student organizations immediately rejected the conference proposal, and on 2 February new student protest marches erupted in several of Pakistan's smaller cities.

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Ayub's Position

13. During the past month, reports have indicated a steady deterioration of Ayub's political base. Since his assumption of power in 1958, the President has relied for support primarily on the military, the Civil Service of Pakistan, the business community, the landowning class, the traditional conservative peasantry, and--to a lesser degree--his hand-tailored political party, the PML. He has also found support among other classes by first establishing and then maintaining stability in a nation which had been on the verge of political chaos in 1958. Ayub, of course, has also made frequent use of the widespread fear that India will try to reincorporate Pakistan into the Indian Union to justify his highly centralized and at times dictatorial rule.

14. The fear of India remains and it is one of Ayub's few remaining psychological weapons. After more than three months of disorders which have grown in intensity, however, Ayub finds it more and more difficult to convince his countrymen that he alone can ensure tranquility in the nation's political life. His repeated warning that without him the nation would revert to the anarchy of 1958 rings increasingly hollow.

15. In the past two months, there have been significant defections away from Ayub from within the highest ranks of the civil service. Others who have not openly resigned, are speaking with unprecedented frankness about the corruption, nepotism, and failures of the regime. There are indications that some civil service workers are dissatisfied with their lot, particularly when comparing their economic gains under the Ayub regime with those of their opposite numbers in the military services. To add fuel to this incipient revolt against Ayub, opposition leaders have begun warning civil servants that excesses committed in support of the present regime will be punished by "people's courts" to be established in the post-Ayub era. During the latter part of January, there were reports indicating that government operations in some smaller towns and rural areas had virtually collapsed.

16. The economic leadership of Pakistan--big businessmen and landowners--probably continues as a

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group to support Ayub. There is evidence of increasing concern, however, over the recurrent disorders and the resultant disruption of economic activities. The press reported that, during the demonstrations of late January, factory production in Karachi fell to 30 percent of normal. In addition, the disorders have rekindled a form of Bengali separatism--never far below the surface--in East Pakistan which could signal danger for the wealthy West Pakistani entrepreneurs with business interests in that province. One report has indicated that a limited flight of capital from Dacca has already begun.

17. The attitude of landowners in the rural areas is less well known, but many may believe, as [redacted] that Ayub is on the way out and the time has arrived to disassociate from the present regime. [redacted] alleged fear of a "peasant revolt" would appear to be unjustified at this time, although shortages and the violence in the cities have caused stirrings of anti-government activity even in this traditionally apathetic class.

18. Ayub's political party, the PML--never a particularly effective organization--appears to have virtually collapsed. Counter-demonstrations to those organized against the government are increasingly infrequent, and the houses of leading members of the PML have been the targets of mobs in both Karachi and Dacca. Some PML Basic Democrats--members of the electoral college--have publicly renounced their party affiliation. At Dacca University, and possibly at other schools, the pro-PML and pro-government students within the National Student Federation defected to the opposition--leaving the regime with no support on the campus.

19. This leaves Ayub largely dependent on the continued loyalty of the military services--specifically the officer corps. During the past month, there have been no new reports of coup plotting [redacted]. Moreover, the army has been strikingly successful in ending disorders and ensuring compliance with curfews. Interestingly, in Karachi during the height of the battle between demonstrators and the police on 25 January, army troops being moved in were cheered by the anti-government mob. Whether such friendly receptions were accorded troops arriving in

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~~SECRET~~

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other cities is not known, but it seems likely that if the army were used over an extended period of time to suppress anti-government activity its popularity would be eroded. Whether senior army officers will continue to regard police-type duty as appropriate for their troops also remains a moot question as does their continued willingness to have the army closely identified with an unpopular regime. Up to the present the army has remained loyal to the government, but whether this is primarily a manifestation of loyalty to Ayub or to legitimacy is not certain.

Short Term Prospects

20. Ayub's proposal of 1 February to meet with the opposition probably was a disappointment to most opposition leaders because he proposed even less than the pro-government press had predicted he would. Unless he is willing to offer further concessions, it would appear unlikely that a conference would be very successful in reestablishing domestic tranquility--in the still uncertain event that Ayub can get the attendance of some of his major opponents.

21. It now appears doubtful that an agreement is possible between Ayub and his opposition given the current situation and the lack of trust which characterizes the relations between the two sides. If the demands of the DAC were met in full, Ayub would appear to be abdicating his power, and there seems little chance he will do that willingly. Under the present electoral system, however, Ayub would appear to have the necessary leverage to ensure his re-election via the mechanism of the Basic Democrats. With the possible exception of Bhutto, it seems most unlikely that the opposition will choose to contest an election under such rules. This probability is reinforced by the apparently widespread public support for the opposition and indications that the government is now at bay. If there were any pressure on opposition politicians to reach an accommodation with Ayub, it would appear to be based on fear that continued disorders could lead to growing power for the more radical politicians, such as Bhutto.

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22. Meanwhile, and regardless of what the leaders of various political parties decide to do, the students have emerged as a new and potent political force in Pakistan. There is good evidence that many of the demonstrations in January were organized and carried out by the students without consultation with opposition political leaders. In general, the leadership of the youthful demonstrators, many of whom are described as frustrated by the likelihood that appropriate jobs will not be available for them upon graduation, is more sympathetic to Bhutto and his "Islamic Socialism" or even to Chinese Communism than to the traditional opposition party programs.

23. Ayub would appear to be drawing close to a momentous decision. He can offer significant concessions to the opposition with the likelihood that he will lose power; he can impose martial law and rule by decree; or he can continue trying to fragment his opposition while making limited concessions and possibly postponing the 1969-70 general elections. The first choice would mean Ayub's political demise; the second probably could be effectual for a limited period if he retains the support of the armed services; and the last could mean more of the same kind of disorders that have plagued Pakistan since last October. Additionally, Ayub could resign or announce his decision not to run for the presidency again. Although there is reported to be some pressure building up [REDACTED] for this course of action, it would not be in keeping with his character. This step would become much more likely if either Ayub's health were to deteriorate or he were confronted with a demand from the army to step aside for some form of "government of national unity."

24. Regardless of Ayub's decision, the outlook for Pakistan in the weeks ahead is for more strikes, protest marches, clashes with security forces, and increasing political instability. The curfews, backed up by army troops, restored a tense peace in the cities. Some of the curfews have recently been lifted, but army troops remain on alert nearby. In this situation, as in the past, the critical factor in the survivability of Ayub and his government is the loyalty to the regime of the nation's armed forces.

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